

Kathmandu -- U.S. Ambassador Nancy J. Powell and Election Commissioner Ms. Usha Nepal opened the Women's Leadership Academy today at a ceremony at the Kathmandu City Hall.

The Women's Leadership Academy, which is being developed by the National Democratic Institute, will provide courses on the constitution drafting process and the fundamentals of democratic politics to newly elected women in the Constituent Assembly, political party leaders, civil society leaders and staff members. Participants will develop skills to better represent their constituents including advocacy, negotiation and policy development. The United States government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will provide US \$1.8 million to the academy over the next two years.

Addressing the Academy's future beneficiaries Ambassador Powell observed, "I am honored to stand among you and express the support of the US Government to the Women's Leadership Academy. Your commitment to public service is an inspiration to women everywhere. With your initiative and conviction, you have helped bring Nepal to this historic point, and with your resolve and hard work you will lead Nepal through this remarkable transition."

Upon completion of the Leadership Academy program, participants will be assisted in conducting community dialogues and developing constituency service strategies in their districts. Support will be provided to the Inter-party Women's Alliance to open new Alliance offices in 33 districts, advocate for women's concerns in drafting the new constitution and hold mock parliament sessions led by women politicians to foster local level debate on constitutional issues. The program is expected to benefit approximately 750 women leaders including parliamentarians, local political party leaders, and civil society leaders.